

**The Idaho State Board of Education's
Committee on the Education
of the Deaf and the Blind**

**Final Report
and
Recommendations**

DECEMBER 2005

Committee Members

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- Milford Terrell
- Senator Hal Bunderson
- Representative Wendy Jaquet
- Representative Donna Pence
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Committee on the Education of the Deaf and the Blind

In July 2005, the State Board of Education created a Committee to examine issues regarding the education of deaf/hard of hearing students and blind/visually impaired students in the State. The Committee was commissioned to collect and analyze information regarding current services, policies, funding and statutory responsibility and to provide recommendations for improving the delivery of services to this population of Idaho students. This document is the final report of the Committee. The report contains recommendations made by the Committee. A full list of the Committee's goals can be found in Appendix A.

Background

Idaho has a significant number of students who qualify for Special Education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). (20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.) These students are identified by local school district teams, assessed and determined to be eligible for services based upon current eligibility criteria. Once these students are identified, Individual Educational Program (IEP) teams consisting of educators, parents and appropriate service providers determine the goals and services the student needs in order to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). These services must be provided in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) that is also determined by the IEP team. The LRE, however, is defined by federal law as a requirement that students with disabilities, including those in public or private institutions or other care facilities, be educated with students who are nondisabled to the maximum extent appropriate. Before placing a student in a more restrictive environment, IEP teams must have collected data regarding the lack of progress of the student in a less restrictive environment and must demonstrate the need for a more restrictive environment.

IEP teams determine the appropriate goals, services and assistive technology for an individual student. The resulting IEP must be based upon individual need and not upon financial or programming decisions for a particular school, district or state agency. The State and the local school district have an obligation to provide eligible students with educational services that allow the student to receive a FAPE. The State and the local school district are not required to provide any or all services requested by a student, a parent or a particular IEP team member. The obligation is to provide needed services that allow the student to meet his/her IEP goals.

The State receives federal funding to provide special education services for students who are eligible for those services. This funding is not adequate to provide complete services for many students with significant disabilities. As a result, local school districts use State funds in addition to federal funds to provide

students with appropriate educational programs. The State also provides funding to the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind (ISDB) to provide services for students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Blind/Visually Impaired or Deaf-Blind. During the 2004/2005 school year, approximately 75 students received day treatment or residential educational services on the ISDB campus in Gooding. Additionally, ISDB reported serving approximately 660 students through its outreach program.

History of Education for the Deaf and the Blind in Idaho

The State statutes establishing a school for the deaf and the blind were enacted in the early 1900s. (I.C. § 33-3401 et seq.) The school was created to educate students from the ages of six to twenty-one who were “too deaf or too blind to be educated in public schools.” The Gooding family deeded land to the State for the use of the school. The land may be used for the continued operation of the school or for any other State purpose. In the event that the State does not utilize the property for State purposes, the property would likely revert to the heirs of the Gooding family.

ISDB has provided residential programs for students at the Gooding campus for over 100 years. These programs have been funded by the State, with some additional federal funds, and have offered districts a needed service in the education of students with particular disabilities. As technology, curriculum and services have become more available to local districts, the need for residential and/or day treatment has decreased and the demand for outreach services from qualified professionals has increased. Outreach services provided by ISDB have expanded accordingly in recent years. However, the current statute continues to focus on a service delivery method at only the Gooding campus, which is not consistent with the federal LRE requirement. Consequently, there is not clear authority in the statute.

Current Situation

Overview: Issues and Recommendations for the Committee on the Education of the Deaf and the Blind

The Committee was asked to examine several issues related to education of deaf and/or blind students in Idaho. The following are the goals that the Committee addressed in its work:

- To review current Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind service delivery systems to assure statutory authority and mandate is being met but not exceeded.

- To review the role and responsibility of local school districts in the education of deaf or blind students and to examine ISDB's involvement in IEP and placement decisions.
- To review and make recommendations for improving the organizational structure for the ISDB residential program, the central campus day program, and regional outreach programs.
- To identify and review the issues associated with a state agency (ISDB) providing educational services to school district students both at the ISDB campus and at the local school district. Issues include the coordination of funding responsibilities of the local school district and ISDB. Also to be reviewed is the ultimate responsibility for the provision of services to students, ISDB or the local district.

The Committee reviewed the work of the Office of Performance Evaluation (OPE). OPE conducted a comprehensive review of the ISDB upon the direction of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee (JLOC). The OPE report included detailed information about the school's responsibilities, enrollment trends, funding and program costs, educational programs and assistive technology. The study included a review of current practices in other states, parent surveys to determine satisfaction with the ISDB program and recommendations for future directions.

In addition to reviewing the work and report from the OPE, the Committee heard testimony from experts in the fields of education, services for persons with particular disabilities, representatives of various stakeholder groups and the public. The Committee reviewed research regarding education for students who are deaf and for students who are blind. They also sought input from state agencies regarding current funding and potential changes in funding.

The Committee carefully considered the reports, research and testimony it received and is prepared to make recommendations in the following areas.

Issues and Recommendations

#1. *Identified Gap: Deaf and Blind – Together or Separate*

General Recommendation: *The Committee recommends that the State separate educational programs for the deaf/hard of hearing students from educational programs for the blind/visually impaired students.*

#2. *Identified Gap: Regional versus Centralized*

General Recommendation: *The Committee recommends that the State provide regional programs located in metropolitan areas within host districts. These*

programs would be located in magnet schools and/or within public school buildings to provide access for students to academic classes at the school. The Committee recommends that the State provide some type of central administration. In addition, the Committee recommends the work group address the needs of students in remote districts that are not close to the regional programs.

#3. Identified Gap: Administrative Structure

General Recommendation: *The Committee recommends that the ISDB administrative structure reflect the service delivery model proposed.*

#4. Identified Gap: Funding

General Recommendation: *The Committee recommends that sufficient funding be provided by the State, and that the funding follow the individual students in a manner determined by the work group, to provide the service delivery model suggested by the work group.*

#5. Identified Gap: Technology

General Recommendation: *The Committee recommends that the approved administrative structure provide a clearinghouse for information regarding assistive technology and that the administrative structure staff implement a parent/community education program to ensure parents/community members are aware of assistive technology and understand how to use such technology.*

#6. Identified Gap: Certification and Pay

General Recommendation: *The Committee recommends that the State Board look at the certification requirements for working with special populations, higher education institutes' ability to provide programs that meet these requirements, and alternate routes to certification in order to ensure that Idaho is producing highly qualified staff members to provide appropriate educational programs (i.e., auditory/oral, total communication and other methodologies) for these (deaf/hearing impaired and blind/visually impaired) populations.*

General Recommendation: *The Committee also recommends that the State Board examine the funding structure for specialists moving from private practice into education to determine if the salary structure creates barriers for professionals interested in moving into educational settings. The Committee recommends that the State work to remove barriers that limit the ability of professionals to move into this educational field.*

General Recommendation: *The Committee recommends that the work group develop a plan to ensure that staff members who work with deaf/hard of hearing*

and blind/visually impaired students receive compensation commensurate with public school professionals.

#7. Identified Gap: Curriculum

General Recommendation: *The Committee recommends that the State utilize current research-based, best practices, curriculum, materials and delivery methods to students in a timely manner to ensure students meet State standards and show growth as measured by State assessments. These programs would be determined by the individual student's IEP team.*

#8. Identified Gap: Outreach

General Recommendation: *The Committee recommends legislative changes to clarify the outreach program mission provided by ISDB and other statutory changes as recommended by the work group.*

Note: Recommendations for statutory changes to clarify current outreach program to be completed by January 2006.

#9 Identified Gap: Transportation

General Recommendation: *The Committee recommends that the work group develop a transportation plan for the proposed delivery model and that funding support the proposed plan.*

#10 Identified Gap: Screening for deaf and hard of hearing/blind and visually impaired.

General Recommendation: *Committee recommends that, in cooperation with the Department of Health and Welfare, the work group propose legislation mandating hearing and vision disability screening of all infants born in Idaho (except where there is parental opt-out) and at critical, defined points during the child's life (i.e. kindergarten registration, enrollment in new school district).*

Recommendation Action

Responsibility: The State Board of Education will appoint a work group to work in conjunction with the Legislature.

Funding source: Federal, State (SBOE, H&W, SDE), private, ISDB Foundation (See Recommendation # 4)

Timeline: Work group's recommendations to be completed on or before January 1, 2008; then presented to the State Board of Education for proposed legislation by January 2009.

Sub Committee Final Meeting and Conclusions

The Committee proposed the following in the final meeting, dated November 28, 2005, in order to ensure the next steps for the *Committee on the Education of the Deaf and the Blind Final Report and Recommendations* document:

General Follow Up

- Send the recommendations document to the State Board of Education for approval with consideration to follow up on the policy recommendations indicated within the document.
- Distribute the recommendations document to school districts, state agencies, universities, and other stakeholders encouraging consideration.
- Present the Committee's final report and Board recommendations to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee (JLOC) at its meeting on December 13, 2005.
- Seek legislative support for the recommended changes.
- Appoint a working group to develop a plan and implement the timeline with appropriate stakeholder involvement.

Policy Consideration

The Committee developed recommendations to be considered as policy. With Board agreement, the Office of the State Board of Education will work with key stakeholders to develop the recommendations into policy agenda items for Board approval.

PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES STATEMENT

State Board of Education Committee On The Education of the Deaf and the Blind

- Goal One:** To review current Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind (ISDB) service delivery systems to assure statutory authority and mandate is being met but not exceeded.
- Goal Two:** To review the role and responsibility of local school districts in the education of deaf and blind students and to examine ISDB's involvement in IEP and placement decisions.
- Goal Three:** To review and make recommendations for improving the organizational structure for the ISDB residential program, the central campus day program, and regional outreach programs.
- Goal Four:** To identify and review the issues associated with a state agency (ISDB) providing educational services to school district students both at the ISDB campus and at the local school district. Issues include the coordination of funding responsibilities of the local school district and ISDB. Also to be reviewed is the ultimate responsibility for the provision of services to students, ISDB or the local district.

Scope:

The Committee is to examine issues regarding the education of deaf and blind students in Idaho. The Committee will collect and analyze information regarding current services, policies, funding and statutory responsibility. A report will be prepared providing recommendations for improving the delivery of services to this population of Idaho students.

Deliverables:

1. Provide to the State Board of Education a written report that includes recommended actions and policy changes necessary to improve the delivery of services to students. This report will include a review of best practices, current operations, management/organizational structure, roles and responsibilities of ISDB and the local or home district and funding sources and responsibilities of ISDB and the home district.
2. Prepare suggested legislative and/or policy changes for consideration by the Board.

ISDB Committee Members

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Appendix C: Office of Performance Evaluation (OPE) Final Report Executive Summary